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AUTHOR Barker, Bruce O.
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ABSTRACT

Based on data from a 1982-1983 study and from other sources, the average annual salaries of teachers in rural schools were compared, by geographical region, with salaries for all public elementary and secondary teachers in the United States, and the average beginning salary for rural teachers was compared with regional data for beginning public elementary and secondary teachers with bachelor's degrees. The nationwide descriptive study of rural school districts collected average annual salary and beginning salary data for rural school teachers from 816 districts in 45 states. For the 1982-1983 academic year the average annual salary for rural teachers in the sample was $16,377, while the National Education Association reported an average salary of $20,531 nationwide. Remuneration to rural teachers was lower than that for all public school teachers in each of the geographic regions. The disparity between the average beginning rural teacher salary as compared to all public teachers was not broad--the average beginning rural teacher salary was above that for all teachers in some regions. It may be that teachers do not stay long enough in rural areas to receive higher salaries even though higher initial salaries may attempt to compensate for distance and isolation. (BRR)

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THE SALARY INEQUITY OF TEACHERS

In

SMALL/RURAL SCHOOLS

A Report Prepared for the Executive Committee

Of The

Rural Education Association

By

*Bruce O. Barker
Box 4110
Texas Tech University
Lubbock, Texas

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*Bruce Barker is an Assistant Professor of Education and Associate Director of Continuing Education at Texas Tech University. He also serves on the Research Committee of the National Rural Education Association and is Assistant Director of the National Center for Smaller Schools at Texas Tech.

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THE SALARY INEQUITY OF TEACHERS IN SMALL/RURAL SCHOOLS

A considerable amount of research and written material has been generated in recent years to show that living in a rural setting and teaching in a small elementary or secondary school presents difficulties and situations not encountered in large school settings (Meier and Edington, 1983; Nachtigal, 1982; and Dodendorf, 1980). Prominently noted among these differences is the claim that teachers in small/rural schools receive significantly lower salaries than their counterparts teaching in metropolitan areas (Carmichael, 1982; Muse et. al., 1975).

The purpose of this report is to present average salary levels of a representative sample of rural teachers across the United States as compared with salaries received during the same time period for all public school teachers nationwide.

PROCEDURE

As part of a nationwide descriptive study of rural school districts completed during the 1982-1983 school year (Barker, 1983), average annual salary and beginning salary data for rural school teachers in 45 different states were collected. The definition of a rural teacher in the study was one who taught in a K-12 public school district which enrolled 900 or fewer students. Findings regarding salary were based upon responses from 627 superintendents who participated in a random sample. The sample size was 816 districts, taken from a universe of 4125, K-12 public school districts that enrolled 900 students or fewer, or 26.4 percent of the nation's 15,600 public school districts (William and Hughes, 1980).

For the purposes of this report, the average annual salaries of teachers in the rural school sample were compared, by geographical region, with salaries for all public elementary and secondary teachers in the United States, as reported by the National Education Association (Education Week 1983). The average beginning salary for teachers in the sample was compared with regional data for beginning public elementary and secondary teachers with bachelor degrees, supplied by the Association for School, College, and University Staffing (Akin, 1983).

FINDINGS

For the 1982-83 academic year, the average annual salary for teachers in the study group was $16,377. The range was from a low of $8,310 (one district in the Midwest) to a high of $39,000 (one district in Alaska), with a standard deviation of $2,893. During the same time period, the National Education Association, using data provided by individual state departments of education, reported that the annual salary for teachers nationwide was $20,531. (Education Week, 1983).

In each of the geographical regions, the remuneration to teachers in the rural school sample was lower than that for all public teachers. The most noticeable difference was in the Mid-Atlantic region where teachers in the sample (N=24) were salaried $5,682 or 24.6 percent below all public teachers in the region. The lowest discrepancy, $2,539, was in the Southwest region (N=137). This was 13.2 percent below the level for all teachers in the region.

A comparison, by geographical region, of average annual salaries for teachers in the sample and the average annual salaries for all public teachers is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1

AVERAGE ANNUAL SALARIES OF TEACHERS IN K-12 PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICTS ENROLLING 900 STUDENTS OR FEWER AND THOSE FOR ALL PUBLIC SCHOOL TEACHERS, LISTED BY GEOGRAPHICAL REGION, 1982-83.

		RURAL TEACHERS	ALL TEACHERS
REGION	N	Salary	Salary
*50 States	627	$16,377	$20,531
NEW ENGLAND *Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire Rhode Island, Vermont	16	15,083	18,812
MID-ATLANTIC Delaware, *Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania	24	17,401	23,083
SOUTHEAST Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia	49	14,400	17,715
GREAT LAKES Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin	74	17,209	21,755
PLAINS Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota	240	15,460	18,930
SOUTHWEST Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas	137	16,755	19,294
ROCKY MOUNTAIN Colorado, Idaho, *Montana, Utah, Wyoming	40	16,488	20,545
FAR WEST **Alaska, California, *Hawaii, Nevada, Oregon, Washington	47	20,518	23,613

*Data from the states of Connecticut, Hawaii, Maryland, Montana, and New Jersey were not collected in the sample of K-12 districts enrolling 900 students or fewer.

Salary levels for all public teachers has been taken from statistics provided by the National Education Association (Education Week, March 23, 1983).

**The average salary for teachers in Alaska was $32,369 (N=5) for rural teachers and $33,953 for all teachers. Removing Alaska's averages from the Far West region results in average salaries for the rest of the region of $19,107 and $23,008, respectively.

The average beginning salaries for elementary and secondary teachers in the rural school sample ranged from a low of $7,700 (one district in Nebraska) to $27,000 (one district in Alaska). The mean beginning salary was $12,375, with a standard deviation of $1,804. According to regional data gathered by the Association for School, College, and University Staffing (Akin, 1983), the average beginning salaries for all public elementary and secondary teachers (1982-83) with bachelor degrees ranged from a low of $10,365 for the New England states to a high of $22,000 for Alaska. In addition to the New England states, the average beginning salaries for teachers in the Plains states and the Southeastern states were also below $12,375. The differences were $324 and $375, respectively. At the same time, the average beginning salaries for teachers in the Rocky Mountain states was $2046 above the rural school sample. Other differences above the sample were: Southwest, $267; Mid-Atlantic, $500; Great Lakes, $515; and Far West, $997.

REMARKS

Findings from this study conclude that for the 1982-83 academic year, the average annual salary for teachers in the rural school sample was $4,125, or 20.2 percent below the salary level for all public school teachers nationwide. The disparity between the average beginning teacher salary in the sample as compared to all public teachers, however, was not that broad. In fact, the average beginning salary for teachers in the rural sample was above the level reported for all public teachers in the New England, Plains, and Southeastern regions. In the other regions, the starting salaries of all public teachers exceeded the rural sample by only $267 to $515, with the exception of the Far Western and Rocky Mountain states where the differences were $997 and $2046.

The findings from this study suggest that the average annual salaries for rural teachers, as a whole, are significantly lower than salaries received by their urban and suburban counterparts; whereas the average starting salaries, for the most part, are not that different.

Two reasons may be postulated to explain why rural teachers receive lower average annual salaries. One is the tenure of rural teachers may not be as long as that for most teachers in metropolitan areas. It is not unusual for beginning teachers to start their careers in a rural school where job openings are more available, and later accept employment in a larger metropolitan school, remaining for the duration of their teaching career. Another reason may be due to factors associated with distance and isolation. Generally speaking, teachers who live in rural areas must travel long distances to colleges or universities to pursue graduate degrees. Consequently, salary adjustments associated with added college credits are more difficult to obtain than for teachers who live in urban areas where they can attend night classes and can live at home while attending summer school.

CONCLUSION

The National Commission on Excellence in Education, in an open letter to the American people, recommended that "Salaries for the teaching profession should be increased and should be professionally competitive, market sensitive, and performance based." (A Nation at Risk, 1983). This recommendation has been common to each of the numerous commissions and national reports released during the past two years on the improvement of public education in America.

If teachers as a whole should be paid higher salaries--and they should--justification for average annual salary increases to rural teachers is even greater. Not only are they compensated at levels lower than other teachers, as evidenced by this study, their workload is often greater (Muse et. al., 1975).

For example, it is not uncommon for rural teachers to assume extracurricular duties without compensation; elementary teachers may teach two or three grade levels in the same class; and secondary teachers may have 3-5 different subject preparations daily.

Any efforts to improve salaries for America's teachers must also emphasize equity for those who teach in small/rural schools. Their numbers are significant, as nearly one-third of all public school teachers in the United States serve predominantly rural constituencies (NCES, 1980).

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